



Selected Press and Texts

Castiel Vitorino Brasileiro

**Mendes
Wood
DM**

São Paulo

Rua da Consolação 3368
01416-000 São Paulo SP Brazil

Brussels

13 Rue des Sablons / Zavelstraat
1000 Brussels Belgium

New York

60 East 66th Street, 2nd floor
New York NY 10065 United States

www.mendeswooddm.com
info@mendeswooddm.com

HYPERALLERGIC

Art **Reviews**

Lingering in the Crossroads Between the Human and the Divine

Castiel Vitorino Brasileiro charts the boundless potential of the spiritual in-between, rendering binaries obsolete.



Daniella Brito May 25, 2021



Documentation of Castiel Vitorino Brasileiro's performance "I only start growing again when I die" (photo by Nayara Maria/@Bufólica, 2020)

ANNANDALE-ON-HUDSON, NY — The Bantu-Kongo cosmogram **dikenga**, proposes fluid boundaries between the physical and spiritual world. This circular diagram, which visualizes the cosmological ethos behind various African and African diasporic religions, refutes linear notions of time and life. A continuous loop of deaths and rebirths transpire daily, cycling through each dimension in concert with the rise and fall of the sun.

The crossroads, or "time of Exu," as it's called in Brazilian Candomblé (after the deity Exu, the gatekeeper of the spirit world), marks the tenuous space between the human and the divine. *Eclipse*, the first US

exhibition of the Brazilian artist Castiel Vitorino Brasileiro, charts the boundless potential of this in-between territory, declaring the crossroads a site where binaries — from light to dark, masculine to feminine, colonized to colonizer — are inverted and often rendered obsolete.



Installation view of *Castiel Vitorino Brasileiro: Eclipse*, Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, 2021 (photo by Olympia Shannon, 2021)

Curated by Bernardo Mosqueira at the Hessel Museum of Art, *Eclipse* includes the titular, site-specific 2021 work alongside six moving image works produced by the artist from 2018 to 2020, each of which is available to stream online throughout the duration of the exhibition. Brasileiro grounds her performance-based work in her practice of Candomblé. Consistently, she marries repetitive bodily movements with richly textured soundscapes to rupture the barriers that divide tangible and intangible spheres of being. As I enter the intimate gallery of “Eclipse” (2021), I am transfixed by Brasileiro’s hushed vocals which emanate tenderly from above. At the center of the dim gallery, a stone basin filled with water sits atop a mound of salt, encircled by a ring of charcoal and shrouded by a thin, cloth veil. Together, these organic materials are charged with spiritual power and Brasileiro, using them as metaphysical conduits, deploys her body as a medium from which to explore manifold states of existence.

Projected onto the pool of water, Brasileiro's body contracts and expands with the tides of the Atlantic Ocean, while the hungry groan of waves crashing resounds throughout the gallery. Her contorting figure, which bobs in and out of a sea of green, refuses categorization, sometimes recalling a mermaid or a fetus gliding through the womb. Removed from the physical world, externally imposed identities like transness and Blackness dissolve here. In their place, Brasileiro conjures an unrestrained, timeless environment for deliberate introspection, mirroring an altar, or a site of worship.



Installation view of *Castiel Vitorino Brasileiro: Eclipse*, Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, 2021 (photo by Olympia Shannon, 2021)

Like in “Eclipse” (2020), Brasileiro's 2019 video work, “Um punhado de onze horas 1 (A handful of eleven o'clock 1),” induces a trance-like state through its repetition, inviting viewers to embody the ephemeral and sacred alongside her. Here, Brasileiro is filmed gingerly potting flowers and herbs as daylight wanes, while her shadowy spirit — a hollow reflection of Brasileiro herself — emerges from behind her, conducting her motions from the crown of her head. As visualized within the *dikenga* cosmogram, midnight marks the apex of the spiritual world. Fittingly, as night darkens in the work, the spirit overcomes Brasileiro and quietly lulls her to sleep, leaving the viewer to imagine the aftermath before she steadily reawakens at dawn.

In a conversation with Mosqueira, archived in the [exhibition catalogue](#), Brasileiro writes, “When the sun dies and moon’s birth starts, I need to be in a safe place. I feel that this moment is an eclipse in me.” At the Hessel, Brasileiro welcomes these periods of immeasurable uncertainty and transition, holding space for onlookers to unearth the metamorphic potential of the unknown.



Installation view of *Castiel Vitorino Brasileiro: Eclipse*, Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, 2021 (photo by Olympia Shannon, 2021)

Editor’s note: This review has been updated to note that Eclipse is on view at the Hessel Museum of Art, not the CCS Bard Galleries.

Castiel Vitorino Brasileiro: Eclipse continues through May 30 at the Hessel Museum of Art (33 Garden Road, Ammandale-On-Hudson, New York). The exhibition was curated by Bernardo Mosqueira.

Exú Tranca-Rua das Almas*

Castiel Vitorino Brasileiro

01_

The freedom of a racialized life depends on its desire to remember what it has forgotten. Because racialization acts on the structuring –or subjectivation–, therefore, it is a limit but also an imposing conduction of rhythm, direction and vital intensity of these animal existences/animal transformed –by colonial modernity– into a *negra/o* subject”.

02_

To remember what was forgotten is a quotidian movement because racial trauma is quotidian. However, the quotidian suffering of the racialized being is not hostage to the memory of a colonial past, but a hostage to the chronological time that organises and is organised by coloniality in the present lived by these existences; and in the past that integrate them and in the chronological future of which they will be part. All the suffering lived by a black person, for “being *negra*,” is a suffering of living in chronological time. Racial trauma is the quotidian experience of living in chronological time, which is the spacetime where the race becomes possible and necessary.

03_

Perishable Spaces of Freedom and Spaces of Perishable Freedom are architectures and corporealities. But the Brazilian *macumbas*¹ centres and the bodies that compose each egregore of these spaces are far –but closer to those who are not *macumbeiras/os*– from being geographical or existential territories of chronological freedom. There is no freedom 24 hours a day there and neither in any other place

–
¹Exú is a creative force, which in Candomblés and Brazilian Umbandas assume themselves as an Orixá. Exú also composes Jurema, and Omoloko cults. In Umbandas, Exú is a force that organises the falange that bears its name “Falange de Exú”. Falange is how we name groups formed by souls worshipped in Umbanda. We name these souls entities, and these entities organise themselves according to the healing frequencies that were acquired in their carnal and spiritual paths. In this sense, the Falange de Exú is constituted of souls who worked in negotiation with the judicial, labor, sexual, monetary dimensions of colonization –but not only–, and such entities can be named Exú Tranca Rua das Almas, Exú Sete Capas, Pomba Gira da Encruza, Maria Padilha das Almas, Maria Mulambo, Exú Caveira, and so many other ways.

marked and organised by colonial temporality; in fact, Brazilian legislation imposes termination hours for *macumbas*, as decades ago it banished them and for centuries steals them. For freedom only happens in the *exúsiastic time*, which is a cyclical and spiralling temporality for all directions. Hence, I believe in freedom as an ephemeral experience that produces an ephemeral spacetime. Freedom is the spatial and temporal condition, thus geographical and existential: *Exú*. Or it is a tool and a movement that makes us access, in a perishable and ephemeral manner, that freedom, that is *Exú*. Freedom is a movement, because *Exú* is the movement that allows all and any movements. We recognize a *Caboclo*, a *Pomba-Gira*, a *Juremeiro*, a *Marujo* or a *Boiadeiro*² through the movements that each soul/memory makes in our arms. Perception and understanding is also a movement.

04_

Under the cognitive and emotional regime of “being *negro*”, there is no possibility of comprehending or enduring not even a small spark of the fire that are the designs of *Exú Tranca Rua das Almas*. But “being *negra/o*” is a fundamental social condition to understand some of the reasons why negro men's souls returned to spaces organized by chronological temporality: our *macumbas* centers, our healing rooms and our corporealities that incorporate them.

05_

The challenge we are invited to by *Exús Malandros* is to live the *malandragem* of collecting *the unpayable debt*³ and to transform money into *aque*⁴. In other words: *Exús Malandros* invite us to experiment or warn us to experiment –otherwise we will forget our unpredictability– the courage to allow yourself to play the *Jogo do Bicho*⁵: one day I dreamt of a snake, last week I dozed off after lunch and I dreamt that I was a kind of *Homo Sapiens Sapiens* with three breasts, and in that same week my grandmother dreamed that a woman would become a huge snake inside her room. *Malandragem*⁶ is to know how to understand these lives from the language that renders us “*negro/as*” and to manage to remember that these lives, like us, did not choose to be catalogued by the Human Sciences

² For these entities/spiritual manifestations, the same thinking on Exú explained in the previous note is applied.

³ FERREIRA DA SILVA, Denise – A Dívida Impagável, Oficina de Imaginação Política & Living Commons, (São Paulo: 2019).

⁴ In Pajubà (language system developed by gender-sex dissident people and non-white in Brazil), *aque* means money. Pajubà is a language in development, and creates herself by appropriating tongues such as English, Portuguese, Spanish, and African from Bantu and Yoruba origin.

⁵ Gambling / luck or chance games, popular in Brazil, even though it is illegal.

⁶ *Malandragem* is a quality of the force/power of Exú that characterises, among several possibilities and descriptions, as disordered negotiations of the modern desire of accumulating.

colors that precede and extrapolate any word.

06_

For an existence to live de-racialization it takes courage, *malandragem* and love for ephemerality. *Malandragem* to have courage to love the ephemerality of life. *Malandragem*, courage and ephemerality are the fundamentals for an *exúsiastic* vital expression to happen. Just like love, unpredictability, and heresy. These are the six tips that make possible the mystery of the pleasure of forgetting the form / way of being *negra; negritude*. But this mystery is not the whitening, but the radicality that is to remember that Orixás have black skin but have no race. We are not Orixás, but our lives also exist beyond the existential limit of racialization. In my childhood, when I lived on the hill of Fonte Grande⁷ I didn't know I was *negra*, even though I was *retinta*. It was at 17, the first time a person left me uncomfortable on saying about my nose. This *negra* woman –one of my best friends to this day– told me that my nose was ugly because it was big, and it wouldn't match the piercing I wanted to put on it. I didn't understand her when she attributed ugliness to my nose. Just as my *retinta* aunt Tatiane did not understand why white people thought she were ugly, because she always knew she was beautiful. My aunt's father, my grandfather Bininho/Benedito Brasileiro, as *retinto* as tar, raised us by calling us black pearls. Our existential reference was always the pearl, and not identity.

07_

Ogum in *Umbanda*⁸ is a knight defender of the Southern Cross. But the cross here is not death by forgetfulness, but a fundamental element of Bakongo Cosmogram that teaches us about the indissoluble connection between death and life that makes it possible to remember that death is the inauguration of another way to live. When in 2018 my grandfather Bininho died, I had the courage to be a *travesti* and I started to want to eat his favourite foods: fish and jackfruit. My grandfather became memory, courage, hunger, and food.

08_

The Umbandas choose which memories to worship and generally decide to forget

⁷Fonte Grande is a neighbourhood community in Vila Velha, State of Espírito Santo, Brazil.

⁸For these entities/spiritual manifestations, the same thinking explained in the previous note applies.

about *travestis*. And we also worship racialized lives, but generally one opts to forget the Brazilian slavery that *Pretos-Velhos* lived. Forgetting that *Pretos-Velhos* are negro men is racism, and to imprison *Pretos-Velhos* in the race *negra* is also a colonial trauma. There is racism and *travesti*-phobia in *Umbanda*. And these disgraces will not be resolved with peace, love, and charity.

09_

Souls are memories. Memories are not discovered; memories are created in the everyday act of wanting not to forget.

10_

Stars are mixtures in balances. The death of a star is the resumption of their life. How to make an egregore, a constellation?

11_

When my life was given to *Exú*, I had the courage to abandon binary polarity, I started to experience the completeness of a hybrid matter. Within me, *Maria Padilha* works with *Exú das Almas*. I'm a *travesti*, I'm binary. But I chose not to forget the limit that these words produce in my existence.

12_

I'm not afraid of death, but of mortification, of murder, of extermination, of genocide. When for 3 seconds I wished for suicide, today I understand that my desire was for oblivion. Then I remembered the *macumba* (they) did in my life. Brasileiro was the name given to my paternal great-grandfather, and when in the beginning of the 20th century he escaped the farm where he was enslaved, named himself Augusto. His war name became my father's name and Castiel's family name. The *macumba* was that I fulfilled the prophecy and, also, changed my name. I'm in flight, but I'm still a messenger. I announce the sacrifice, the blood that must be spilled, the killing that must take place, the cut. I announce the cut.

13_

Exú locks the street that takes souls to captivity. *Exú* locks the street of souls that imprison us. Souls are memories, *Exú* is life.

14_
Temperance.

15_
The passion. The devil. The fatality.

I am against pornography. I hate pornography. I don't mean fuck or sex whatever is agreed between the lives that participate, because I am not interested in snooping the intimacy of sexual relations of Homo Sapiens Sapiens. Nor do I offer salvation to people who live a sexual life ordered by the desire to hypersexualize or being hypersexualized, because I don't believe in salvation. For if here in modernity there is no freedom, in *Aruanda*⁹ conflicts are also not over.

What I desire is the end of pornography as the colonial program it is, but before I wish that my existence continues to disrupt the vital directions and rhythms that pornography presents to me. To break with the walking and pathways we've done together and the possibilities of vital drives that it still presents me. However, the continuity of the crossings of our contrary paths is inevitable. Daily, we meet, and in each meeting, I abandon the fear of being captured, I approach pornography and I analyse in me, the vital need that is exchanged in this strange facultative mutualism. Because yes, there is always a choice; and here I am not associating with neoliberalism.

Notice, within facultative mutualism, organisms are associated, but they manage to live without the other in an isolated manner, without any damage. An example of this relationship are those in which a bird starts to feed on ticks present in bulls, and oxen allow such relationships because in their your body, ticks act as parasites. Obviously to compare pornography to a bird or a bull and even a tick, is not only cruelty to such animals but also a complete anachronism and asymmetry. But perhaps it is possible to perceive an facultative mutualism happening between us, of the same animal species, through the demarcation and colonial categorization of our phenotypic and cultural differences, and the pornographic manipulation of these features, a manipulation that obeys the racialization agenda

Sometimes I still like to think with mutualism, because these ecological relationships, for being interspecific, always mark difference. In that sense, I ask myself: through what vital need do I connect my life to the pornographic vital expression? In other words, what makes it possible to desire to be racialized?

—
⁹ Zone of the umbandista/Umbanda spiritual world.

Because this is at the core of the pornographic event: to racialize. Pornographic racialization is this colonial relationship –of space and time–, where the self connects itself to the other, or the other connects to the self, through a vital desire. Desire for what?

I believe it is the desire to create and sustain the desire to racialize and to be racialized. And I say create, because the Svadhithana chakra (the sexual) teaches us that sexual energy is a very powerful experience of creation. But, without making the studies of these energy centers into modes of moralizing sex and sexuality; to the opposite, using them to create a *Travesti* Spirituality, I ask: How to create quotidianly the end in ourselves of our desire for the hypersexualization of black bodies? How to create quotidianly in ourselves the end of our desire for the hypersexualization of black bodies? And this desire being the result of racism, the desire is to live racialization. And what is not in life that allows itself to be coordinated by pornography is the *malandragem* of cheating without being cheated.

I also say that this is probably one of the last moments that I will use mutualism to speak about our pornographic cultural relationships, and I also announce my direction to perceive us among intraspecific disharmonic relationships, those that produce losses. Because (you) see, to ally yourself with pornography is a facultative position, the benefits are the pleasures and the capitalistic usurpation of that pleasure, because capitalism also allows us to live so that it can usurp from our vitality; but capitalist culture does not understand anything about souls, because it believes in death/murder as an end. However, to think of the pornographic relationship as mutualism is to assume that there is no damage to pornography when a captured life starts to get rid of this relationship and even while sustaining it. I'm saying about the embodiment of pornography –memory, desire– so I believe that in its abandonment, there is a loss to life that insists on racializing and hypersexualizing. In that sense, dating, marriage, friendship, and family bonds may come to an end, for example, but an end that always inaugurates another relationship, where distance and meetings are reorganised. I believe in the need to end these relationships of hypersexualized racialization. I believe and create the demand to produce losses, harms, damages to the pornographic way of thinking, feeling, and expressing our vitality.

So, the limit of an analysis of pornographic relationships that uses mutualism as a lens is that this lens does not allow us to see the disharmony that happens in this proto cooperation. Mutualism helps us to understand the reasons and conditions for daily accepting to live under the regime of pornography, and mutualism shows us the strategies of permanence of a vital pornographic

expression. That is, using the lens of mutualism, we will not see the suffering that is to live within a pornographic protocoperation. When the maned *lobo-guará* on the *lobeira*¹⁰, its digestion does not destroy the seeds of that plant, and their defecations distribute these seeds in other areas of the ecosystem. But this is no longer my position with pornography, where desire is made a fertilizer or seed for the emergence and permanence of relationships marked by racialization. I am in a disharmonious intraspecific relationship of competition. Competition between individuals of the same species is generally regulated by the number of resources available in the ecosystem. In our case –as Homo Sapiens Sapiens species organised by category and processes of humanization and dehumanisation–, competition is for vitality, and in mutualism there is a sharing of the desire to live the pleasure of creation. But my vitality is breaking with this relationship. It's a cut, and not an exchange. I'm assuming the disharmony that happens in our species, and for now that's what I want to talk about, denounce, think about. Our disharmony. But a hopeless speech.

I know that there is a danger in taking on competition in neoliberal times. But what I learned in my childhood on the *Morro da Fonte Grande*, while playing *capoeira*, is that when the *bixo pega*, the *capoeirista* has to use his body, its agility, its *mandinga* and its strong prayer. The *roda de capoeira* prepares us for the death struggle that is to live coloniality, it is to kill or die¹¹.

7

16_

Travesti Spirituality is a catastrophe, a destruction. It's what makes a tower collapse, it is the deck of that collapse, it's the twilight that starts with the dust from the wreckage, but it will never be the wreckage. We are not the remainder of what broke, but what made it break. *Travesti* spirituality is a dance between brain, heart, and sex.

17_

To ancestralize is remembering, making the soul present through incorporation. But a firm body is required to support the dance that the memories of this life will do in our matter. Allow that *Lacraia*¹² uses our body to dance once again. To dance like a *lacraia*, to dance like a member of the family *Scolopendridae*. To Hybridise oneself, to be contradictory to modern socio-natural parameters and psychics.

–

¹⁰ *Lobo Guará* (*Chrysocyon brachyurus*) and *lobeira* (*Solanum lycocarpum*).

¹¹ "Uma noite sem lua", Mestre Toni Vargas. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A3YhLQrQNlM> (access February, 16th, 2022).

¹² *Lacraia* here refers to the figure of the Funk Carioca dancer and musician.

18_

Hidden enemies can't hide to our eyes that are not charmed with the fallacies of visibility. The sublimation of sexual energy is the secret of all empires. We fought bloody battles against the tenebrous because we believe in love as a gale that fear. We are the Abyss and the temptations; we belong to *Maria Navalha*. So *Travesti* Spirituality takes us away to the city of Beyond, to the infinite. As long as we are alive, we will kill ourselves for love. And when dead, for love we will kill.

19_

I am not an *Umbandista*, I am a *macumbeira* and I practice the Shitty Sacred Feminine.

20_

I want to write and I'm already writing with my third breast burning. I'm going to call this area the third breast, even though it's also a wound that gets in deep flesh wound when I'm stressed and trying to keep this stress just to me. My grandma Julite always talks about the carcinogenic dangers of keeping stress. I've already told (you) that the stress caused by the anxiety that is to live within the racial and gender times caused me gastritis.

Speaking of my grandmother, I stopped to think about me and my artist friends who value these elders so much. We've spent the last few years stating the importance of their old words to be able to build our new times. The new time has now arrived. And honestly, if I were a grandmother, I would be tired of helping my granddaughters.

The pain in my chest is from a body that is transmuting. I am transmuting and learning to deal with the feeling of anger, not wanting to transform anger into rancour... but I need to access anger! But it's so hard to access anger away from Fonte Grande because I'm afraid of exploding and without being able to pick up the glass shard. And also, I'm not even a transparent glass anymore... I once wanted to be and so far, some (people) made me want to have this transparency of being visible to all. But now I don't want it anymore.

I understood that I am dark, inconsistent and a liar. I'm that glass that when (it) hits desires that... I don't know... (that) the body that is cut by me is prepared to initiate resurrection. Because that's what I'm doing when I splinter. The total decomposition of glass in nature can last up to 1 million years.

21 / 3 = 7 or 21 / 7 = 3, therefore $3 + 3 = 6$ or $8 = \infty$. But infinite for me are not the possibilities to transit between binary polarity. Infinite is the crossroads.

Or: I am the messenger who announces a Travesti Transmutation. I announce the Transmutation that we call *travesti*.

This text was first published as a participation of the artist on the EhChO platform in July 2020

Castiel Vitorino Brasileiro (1996) was born in Brazil and belongs to an AfroBantu family lineage. She is a visual artist, writer, and has a master's degree in Clinical Psychology. Her works include photography, video making, dancing, painting, and installation (ofemples).

With her artistic and academic practice, Castiel is interested in studying the principle of Transmutation as an unavoidable destiny. For that, she dribbles, incorporates, and immerses herself in the Bantu ontology, assuming healing [cura] as a perishable moment of freedom. Currently, Castiel studies and builds interspecific spirituality and ancestry.

Born Fonte Grande. Vitória/Espírito Santo - Brasil.

Living and Work in Planet Earth

graphic design

Diego Crux. Artist born and raised on the edge of the city, in the neighborhood of Parada de Taipas, today he lives in the center. Grandson of Rosa (Rose) and Esmeraldo (Emerald), he is the color that recalls memory. He researches intimate and personal issues, collective experiences, representation, identity and the limits, unknowns and contradictions in these crosses. He imagines and builds. He questions and rethinks. He participated in exhibitions in São Paulo (BR), Curitiba (BR), Copenhagen (DK) and Accra (GH) and he was an artist in residence at Pivô Pesquisa (2020) and MAM Rio (2021).